

Christians Are Self-Censoring Their Beliefs due to Secular Intolerance, Study Finds

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According to a new report, Christians who find it difficult to freely express their beliefs in society due to secular intolerance are practicing “various forms of self-censorship.”

The report, titled “Perceptions on Self-Censorship: Confirming and Understanding the ‘Chilling Effect,’” (https://www.intoleranceagainstchristians.eu/fileadmin/user_upload/publications/files/Chilling_Effect_2022_-_ONLINE_Version_A4.pdf) was put together by the Observatory on Intolerance and Discrimination Against Christians in Europe, the Observatory of Religious Freedom in Latin America and the International Institute for Religious Freedom. The study features case studies from France, Germany, Colombia and Mexico.

“Secular intolerance has a chilling effect on Christians, which directly affects their capacity to express their faith (<https://www.crosswalk.com/faith/>) freely in society and is leading to various forms of self-censorship,” the study said. “Some people do indeed fear being subjected to legal proceedings or being criminally sanctioned on charges of discrimination, while others fear being subjected to disciplinary proceedings in their work or places.”

“With some exceptions, the majority chose to keep its expressions of faith or its opinions on issues related to life, marriage (<https://www.crosswalk.com/family/marriage/>) and the family from a Christian doctrine perspective private because they had witnessed sanctions or prosecutions to which colleagues or peers had been subjected,” the report added.

According to *The Christian Post* (<https://www.christianpost.com/news/secular-intolerance-of-christians-is-leading-to-self-censorship-report.html>), the report’s authors stressed that while some of the incidents cited in the report may seem insignificant, when compounded, they can ultimately cause believers to feel uncomfortable living out their faith.

“A few cuts do not kill you and barely hurt. But continuous small strikes eventually have an impact. We posit that the accumulation of seemingly insignificant incidents creates an environment in which Christians do not feel comfortable – to some degree – to live their faith freely,” the report explained. “Indeed, Western Christians experience a ‘chilling effect’ resulting from perceived pressures in their cultural environment, related to widely mediatized court cases.”

“Because of the subtle and generally non-physically violent nature of the chilling effect, it is often misunderstood or even ignored and therefore largely remains invisible,” the report continued.

“This is the main reason why the phenomenon is not recognized in religious freedom datasets such as the Pew Research Center indexes,” the authors stated.



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The report noted that self-censorship not only limits people from expressing their religious beliefs “but also that these violations to the right to religious freedom can cause the disappearance of religion in a given context.”

As reported by Christian Today

(<https://www.christiantoday.com/article/chilling.effect.of.secular.intolerance.on.christians.is.leading.to.self.censorship.report.warns/138733.htm>)

Madeleine Enzelberger, executive director of OIAC Europe, explained that the study “raises the legitimate question of: how is it possible in a mature, liberal democratic society that stands for tolerance, diversity, and inclusive and open discourse, that people are frightened to freely speak their minds?”

Most Christian participants in the study were unaware of their self-imposed censorship. However, some have censored themselves so regularly that they have stopped “seeing the characteristics related to self-censorship as a problem.”

“The Church has allowed itself to be self-censored ... Christian religious leaders have more freedom to express themselves freely (but they do not always take advantage of it),” the study asserted.

In response to self-censorship, the author’s stressed there must be “an urgent need to educate policymakers, public servants (including the police) and judges about religion to increase their religious literacy.”

“We have seen that a high degree of religious illiteracy leads to misunderstanding of how religion informs behavior in different spheres of society and what the legitimate role of religion in the public domain is,” the authors wrote. “Illiteracy, therefore, can consequently be the cause of ‘practical intolerance’ against Christians.”

Photo courtesy: ©Getty Images/Marina Khromova

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